

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of the claims:

1. – 20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently amended) A ~~method for handling an issue related to a design of product using a computer-a system that allows collaboration between a plurality of users to design a product, the computer system method comprising:~~

a database that stores a decision tracking object model having data that includes questions posed by the users about the design of the product, answers to the questions, and decisions of the questions that decide a design aspect of the product;

a graphical user interface that enables the users to access the decision tracking object model and to enter the questions, the answers, and the decisions; and

a plurality of different software application tools that create objects for the design of the product and that use the graphical user interface to access the answers, the questions, and the decisions in the decision tracking object model.

~~storing a question related to the issue, wherein the question is provided by a first user of the plurality of users;~~

~~storing an answer related to the question, wherein the answer is provided by a second user of the plurality of users; and~~

~~storing a decision made based on the answer, wherein the decision is made by a third user of the plurality of users.~~

22. (Currently amended) The computer system-method of claim 21, wherein none of the plurality of different software application tools has ownership of the data in the decision tracking object model, and any of the plurality of different software application tools can access the data in the decision tracking object model. the plurality of users interacts with at least one of the question, the answer, and the decision via a graphical user interface.

23. (Currently amended) The computer system-method of claim 21, wherein each of the plurality of different software application tools use the graphical user interface to read and write the data that includes the questions, the answers, and the decisions. further comprising:
implementing the decision for this issue into the design; and
forming the product from the design.

24. (Currently amended) The computer system-method of claim 21, wherein the graphical user interface presents dialogue windows for the users to enter the questions, the answers, and the decisions. storing of the question, the answer, and the decision is in a tool neutral persistent form.

25. (Currently amended) The computer system-method of claim 21, wherein each of the questions, the answers, and the decisions are created by the users using the plurality of different software application tools. stored in a separate relational database, the method further comprising:
using foreign keys to maintain associations between each of the question, the answer, and the decision.

26. (Currently amended) The computer system-method of claim 21, wherein the answers, the questions, and the decisions are stored in tables that are readable by the plurality of different software application tools, further comprising:

~~storing at least one association between at least one of the issue, the question, the answer, and the decision, and another of the issue, the question, the answer, and the decision.~~

27. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the plurality of different software application tools includes a Computer Aided Design (CAD) tool and a Product Data Management (PDM) tool, method of claim 26, wherein storing at least one association comprises:

~~storing an association of the question with the decision along with the question.~~

28. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the graphical user interface enables the users to query the questions, the answers, and the decisions, method of claim 26, wherein storing at least one association comprises:

~~storing an association of the answer with the question along with the answer.~~

29. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the answers, the questions, and the decisions are stored in relational database files, method of claim 26, wherein storing at least one association comprises:

~~storing an association of the decision with the answer along with the decision.~~

30. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the data includes names of persons making the decisions and reasons for the decisions, method of claim 26, wherein storing at least one association comprises:

~~storing an association of the issue with the question.~~

31. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the decisions include decisions relating to design alternatives of the product.~~-method of claim 26, wherein there are a plurality of questions related to the issue and a plurality of answers related to the plurality of questions.~~

32. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the users pose questions about the design of the product and automatically receive feedback to the posed questions from the decision tracking object model.~~-method of the claim 31, comprising:~~

~~storing an association for each answer of the plurality of answers that indicates that each answer of the plurality of answers is associated with only one question of the plurality of questions.~~

33. (Currently amended) The computer system of claim 21, wherein the decision tracking object model can be queried for all of the questions and all of the answers to the questions.~~-method of the claim 31, comprising:~~

~~storing an association for each question of the plurality of questions that indicates that each question of the plurality of questions is associated with the issue.~~

34. (Canceled)

35. (New) A system, comprising:

a database that stores a decision tracking object model having data that includes questions posed by users about a design of a product, answers to the questions, and decisions that decide a design aspect of the product; and

plural different software application tools that design the product and that use a graphical user interface to enter the answers, the questions, and the decisions.

36. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein the graphical user interface enables the users of the plural different software application tools to read and write the answers, the questions, and the decisions.

37. (New) The system of claim 34, wherein none of the plural different software application tools has ownership of the data in the decision tracking object model, and any of the plural different software application tools can access the data in the decision tracking object model.

38. (New). The system of claim 34, wherein the graphical user interface presents dialogue windows for the users to enter the questions, the answers, and the decisions.

39. (New). The system of claim 34, wherein the answers, the questions, and the decisions are stored in tables that are readable by the plural different software application tools.

40. (New). The system of claim 34, wherein the plural different software application tools includes a Computer Aided Design (CAD) tool and a Product Data Management (PDM) tool.

41. (New). The system of claim 34, wherein the graphical user interface enables the users to query the questions, the answers, and the decisions and receive automatic feedback from the decision tracking object model.